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FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO  
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INFO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTIAGO 001150

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CHILE: LOOKING TO THE U.S. FOR INSPIRATION ON POLITICAL  
RENEWAL

REF: SANTIAGO 1062

11. Summary: Young Chileans have long complained about uninspiring political leaders, weakening political parties, and the overall lack of renewal in local politics. A glance at Chile's presidential candidates and other political leaders shows that, for the most part, individuals who emerged as leaders following Pinochet's defeat in 1990 remain at the forefront of Chilean politics. In this context, Barack Obama's election has captured the imagination of Chile's younger generation of political activists and leaders who hope for an Obama-style political renaissance. Three emerging leaders described as the "Chilean Obamas" recently described how politics needs to be more closely connected to people's problems and called for changes to Chile's voting rules to encourage more voting by young adults. Unfortunately, their dreams of renewal are unlikely to be realized when the political elite have the most to lose from any voting reforms. End Summary.

Three Chilean Obamas  
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12. After years of stagnating politics and little political participation by younger Chileans, Chile has finally found an inspirational figure on whom to pin its hopes for renewal: President-elect Barack Obama. In a seminar titled "We Need to Renew Chilean Politics" hosted by the independent think tank *Independientes en Red* on December 11, moderator and television journalist Gonzalo Feito presented three panelists as the "three Obamas": Claudio Orrego, Mayor of Penalolen; Jose Antonio Kast, Deputy representing the southwestern district of the Santiago Metropolitan Region; and Felipe Harboe, former Undersecretary of Interior. Although they hail from the elite upper-middle class, all three have a strong social focus, and interact closely with marginalized communities. They are viewed as dynamic, charismatic personalities destined to lead the revitalization of Chile's political scene, and some of them seem to secretly relish the Obama comparison: Orrego's website includes a pop art image of him, a la Obama.

-- Claudio Orrego; Mayor of the large and diverse Penalolen municipality in Santiago:

Orrego, who received a Master's degree in Public Policy from Harvard's Kennedy School, is known as one of the "princes" of the centrist Christian Democratic Party (DC) - someone expected to inherit a powerful position within the party (Reftel). However, when asked, he expressed displeasure with this royal reference, saying "positions of political power are not inherited, they are won through votes." Orrego said he feared that the current structure and culture of the DC don't allow for the much needed generational renewal, foreshadowing his faction's poor showing at the DC national conference on December 13. (Note: The DC national consensus board elected Deputy Juan Carlos Latorre, a Soledad Alvear confidant, as party president until 2010. Referring to the princes in his acceptance speech, Latorre stated that no group inside the DC should claim that there isn't room for participation within the party. End note.)

-- Jose Antonio Kast; Deputy representing low-income Southwestern Santiago:  
Kast, a conservative Deputy from the far-right Independent Democratic Union (UDI) party is serving his second congressional term. He participates in the Chamber of Deputies' Education, Family, and Youth Committees. In his speech, Kast emphasized the renewed need to make sense of politics, citing "a disconnect between politicians and the real problems of the people" and stating that in Chile "leaders have little faith in innovative, enterprising people." Kast is the son of German immigrants who are the founders of a local restaurant chain and food production company. His deceased older brother Miguel Kast was a "Chicago Boy," (Note: The "Chicago Boys" were young Chilean economists who trained under Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago in the 1970s and then implemented their free market ideas during the Pinochet regime. End note.) and early leader in the Pinochet government, having served as Minister of Labor (1980-1982).

-- Felipe Harboe; Former Undersecretary for Interior, planning to run for Congress:

Harboe's first public speaking appearance after stepping down a few weeks ago from his position as Undersecretary of Interior (2006-2008) proved to be his debut on the political stage. (Note: Chilean law does not allow high-ranking appointed government officials to run for elected office within one year of holding appointed office. Any officials wishing to run for Parliament had to resign by December 11 to be eligible for election. End note.) Harboe is an active member of the Party for Democracy (PPD) and is their favorite to run for current Deputy Carolina Toha's seat representing the district of Central Santiago in next year's parliamentary elections. (Note: Toha, a PPD Deputy, will not run

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for reelection. She most likely will run for Senate. End note.) Already speaking with the voice of a candidate, he emphasized the need for more access to information and civic education, calling for "transparency, efficacy, and efficiency."

#### Proposals: Younger Voters and Younger Politicians

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13. Orrego, Kast, and Harboe all cited the need for change in Chile's voting procedures, where a cumbersome registration process and mandatory voting for registered voters keep registration rates low. This rigid structure, which does not include measures for absentee ballots or overseas voting, is often blamed for low participation rates by younger adults. (Note: Adults age 18-29 account for less than 8% of registered voters, while making up for approximately 23% of the population. End note.) One proposal, supported by Orrego and Harboe, would automatically register all Chileans to vote on their eighteenth birthday. In lieu of an automatic registration system, Kast proposed keeping registration voluntary, but making registration available at a wider range of locations (e.g. universities, identification services, DMV, etc.) All agree that making voting optional would encourage more young people to register and vote in future elections.

14. The three panelists encouraged the young audience to take a more active role in politics claiming that younger politicians would inspire more Chileans to vote. Kast criticized the youngest leaders, mostly the university student associations, for only focusing on volunteer work when they should be taking political action. He stated that the responsibility for making a change falls on the youth and that "we need not only new faces, but young faces in politics." Harboe concurred, adding that "the problem is not politics itself, but rather the politicians." While Orrego stated that the DC's old guard hasn't allowed for new politicians to take on higher positions within the party, Kast highlighted that UDI does allow for fresher faces, attributing this to the fact that UDI is a newer party, founded in 1983, while DC is over fifty years old. UDI has already developed some initiatives to groom young emerging leaders for political careers. (Note: In a November meeting between the conservative Jaime Guzman Foundation and E/POL Officers, foundation representatives highlighted their program which helps UDI

identify recent graduates with leadership potential for mayoral and city council positions throughout the country. End note.)

15. Comment. Multiple polls in recent years have shown that Chileans want change: new faces, new leadership, and a revitalized group of young adults in politics. However, the old guard politicians are not willing to give up their turf, claiming that rising stars need to focus on party unity rather than on their individual political careers. In reality, chances for a Chilean Obama are slim. The idea only exists in the public discourse at the moment; when it's time to vote, the party elite play it safe rather than taking risks with the unknown. End comment.

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